

AN ACCOUNT OF 9/11 BY A FIRST-RESPONDER

by CAPT (ret.) William Durm, DC, USN

Editor's note. This testimonial was commissioned in 2011 for the Dental Corps Centennial Book.

It was a routine Tuesday at the Pentagon. I was the Commander of the Tri-service Dental Clinic on September 11th, 2001 and had my usual morning staff meeting and I was getting started with patient care when my assistant informed me that she got a call about a plane crash in NY. We thought it was a small weather plane. After I finished my patient, I turned on the news in my office and saw the second plane go into the Trade Center.



The garrison flag is hung from the still smoldering Pentagon by service

members and firefighters.

Department of Defense photo

I was just getting ready to see my next patient when we received a call from the medical clinic that is co-located with dental in the Pentagon that they had a medical emergency and needed all medical personnel. The time was 0842. I had 18 dentists aboard that day from all services. The Navy Dentists at the Pentagon besides me were Capt. Charles Turner, Capt. Gerald Santulli, Lt. Cmdr. Trent Outhouse, Capt. Carol Walker, and Lt. Sherma Saif. When I reported to the front of medical, I was informed that most of the physicians were at a meeting at Walter Reed that morning including Medical's Commander. I was then informed that I would be the acting Commander on scene until relieved by higher authority. At this point we did not know what had happened on the other side of the Pentagon.

As we arrived in the courtyard of the Pentagon, all our providers-really the first responders- quickly went to work treating the casualties that had been brought out of the side of the Pentagon that had black smoke

coming from it. They did a superb job of identifying the injuries, stabilizing the patients, and getting them to a safe area to be taken to a care facility. All the mass casualty drills that we had during ship duties really came in handy! Again at this point we really did not know the cause or extent of the incident.

A few of us then went into the building where we could see damage to help get the injured out. As we progressed into the building, we were informed by the fire department that a plane had crashed into the Pentagon and we had 66 souls aboard the plane. We continued to look for injured personnel and helped several out of the building. We were hampered by very thick smoke and poor visibility. Unfortunately, many still in the building were beyond help.

After doing all we could in this area, we proceeded to the front of the building and set up our triage stations by colors as we were taught in our military training. About this time, we saw our AF fighters overhead waving their wings, saying we've got your back! You can image the cheering! We were able through the help of the FBI to get information to our commands that our personnel assigned to the clinic were OK. Our families were then informed by the Commands. You can image what our families were thinking when they saw the TV pictures. We did not take many more injured after 1130. Arlington County Emergency Medical relieved me at about 1200. We were then assigned to set up a temporary morgue in the courtyard; however we did not use it that day! You can also image the feelings of each one of us as our Flag was lowered on the side of the Pentagon!

We secured at about 2100, and were all back to work in the clinic by 0600 the next day. I think we all needed to be together and work through what we saw and did. The 0900 patient that I had on 9-11 came in to see me to relate that if he did not have an appointment with me on the morning of 9-11, he would have died since the plane went through his office and killed everyone!

It is interesting to note that dental personnel were involved in 50% of all causality treatment on 9-11 at the Pentagon.

For their actions on that day, all the Navy personnel received Army Commendation Medals.

LT Saif and I received the Navy-Marine Medal.